

WHOOPING CRANE
(ROCKY MOUNTAIN POPULATION)
(Grus americana)

STATUS: Extirpated from Arizona.

SPECIES DESCRIPTION: The tallest American bird, with males approaching 1.5 m (5 ft). Large, snowy white, and long necked, with long legs that trail behind in flight. Has black primary feathers, a red crown, and a wedge-shaped patch of black feathers behind the eye. Wingspan can reach 2.1 m (7 ft). They feed on small grains like corn and wheat, as well as aquatic plants, crustaceans, and small vertebrates.

HABITAT: Marshes, shallow river bottoms, potholes, playas, prairies, and cropland at an elevation of approximately 1,372 m (4,500 ft).

RANGE: Historic: Once ranged over most of North America, but probably never occurred in large numbers. By the 1800s, only a few thousand survived. Birds that summered in the northern Rocky Mountain states and western Canada probably passed through New Mexico en route to and from wintering areas in the Mexican highlands and southern Texas. The area around Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge in New Mexico was the wintering area of the experimental Rocky Mountain population of whooping cranes. This experimental nonessential Rocky Mountain whooping crane population is now thought to be extirpated (1975-2002). Before being extirpated, individuals from this experimental nonessential Rocky Mountain population would occasionally stray from migration routes to southeastern Arizona.

Current: Wild populations occur in the U.S. in south Texas around Aransas National Wildlife Refuge, with 173 birds in 2002; and in Kissimmee, Florida, and in Wisconsin. There are currently about 90 non-migratory whooping cranes in Florida, and 5 whooping cranes in Wisconsin that last year were flown behind an ultralight plane, wintered in Florida and returned to Wisconsin on their own. Researchers are currently training 17 more whooping cranes in Wisconsin to follow the ultralight this fall. The Texas population summers in Wood Buffalo National Park, Northwest Territory, Canada, while the Florida population is non-migratory.

REASONS FOR DECLINE/VULNERABILITY: Endangered due to destruction of wintering and breeding habitat, collisions with power lines and fences, shooting, specimen collection, and human disturbance.

NOTES: Endangered (32 FR 4001, March 11, 1967) with critical habitat (43 FR 20938, May 15, 1978). Within the area covered by this listing, this species is known to occur in: Colorado, Idaho, Kansas, Montana, North Dakota, Nebraska, New Mexico, Oklahoma, South Dakota, Texas, Utah, Wyoming.

A Recovery Plan was completed in 1980 and revised in 1986 and 1994. A copy of the recovery plan can be found online at: <http://arizonaes.fws.gov/Documents/RecoveryPlans/WhoopingCrane.pdf>

Intensive captive breeding has been conducted by both the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Canadian Wildlife Service.